

UW Health: COVID-19 pandemic overshadows rise in overdose visits to the emergency department

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MADISON – At UW Health and nationally, emergency departments during the COVID-19 pandemic have witnessed a hidden spike in opioid overdoses.

Nationally, from mid-April to October 2020, the weekly rates of emergency department visits for opioid overdoses increased by as much as 45% when compared against the same period in 2019, according to a recent study in [JAMA Psychiatry](#).

UW Health and the BerbeeWalsh Department of Emergency Medicine have witnessed a 15% increase in emergency department visits related to opioid overdose in 2020, according to Dr. Mike Replinger, associate professor, emergency medicine and radiology, and director of research education in the department.

“Sadly, an unintended consequence of the pandemic is that it has forced people into isolation in many places, often taking away the support systems for those managing opioid addiction,” he said. “Additionally, the introduction of new types of synthetic opioids has added to an already terrible situation.”

Other factors have led to the rise, including patients being prescribed larger quantities of medications and a lack of access to Suboxone due to clinic closures during the pandemic, Replinger said.

Replinger is available for media interviews today.